

Dumping ground: Nuclear waste and Utah don't mix

Tribune Editorial

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Clouds are gathering. A perfect storm is brewing. A radioactive storm.

Circumstances - world-wide nuclear power proliferation in response to global warming, Nuclear Regulatory Commission reluctance to ban imported radioactive waste, the presence of a home-grown low-level radioactive waste dump in Utah, plans for a nuclear power plant in the state, and a low-pressure system resulting from short-sighted elected officials and an apathetic public - have combined to put Utah squarely in the storm's path.

The forecast is grim: There's a chance that Utah could become the dumping ground for the world's radioactive waste.

But if we act fast, if we put the pressure on our public officials, it's not too late to steer the storm away.

Here's some background information you'll find helpful as you lobby on our state's behalf.

The world is turning toward nuclear power to combat climate change. In the U.S. alone, the NRC expects to receive as many as 30 applications for new nuclear power plants by 2010. Other countries are doing the same. That means a lot more dangerous nuclear waste, everything from mildly-contaminated clothing to lethal spent fuel, will need to be disposed of - somewhere.

The fact that the NRC has set a dangerous precedent by allowing domestic disposal firms to import irradiated materials from other countries makes it more likely that significant amounts of the world's waste will come to the United States.

And Utah's low population and vast open spaces, plus the precedent that was set when we allowed a low-level radioactive waste dump to be foisted upon it, makes it more likely that this will be the place.

Add to that the fact that EnergySolutions, which owns and operates our radioactive waste disposal facility in Tooele County, is attempting to import 20,000 tons of irradiated waste from Italy, and, well, you see the big picture.

Of course, Gov. Jon Huntsman, EnergySolutions, and the politicians in its pockets, say not to worry. When the dump is full, we're done. End of story.

Don't believe it. The money is too tempting; the threat is real.

So call the governor, and your state and federal legislators, and express your concern about nuclear power and radioactive waste.

Tell them, in no uncertain terms, to tell the NRC to deny the request to import irradiated materials from Italy. Tell them Utah has already taken enough radioactive waste from elsewhere. Tell them we're not going to take it anymore.

There's a chance that Utah could become the dumping ground for the world's radioactive waste.